

NOAA 9 ENTERS THE RECORD BOOKS

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NOAA 9 is still alive and well! The 450 mile-high polar-orbiting weather satellite was launched on 12 December 1984 in a sun-synchronous orbit of near 1000 and 2200 local time. Its orbit has shifted slowly and is now near 0900 and 2100 local time. During the first week of February 1994, the author checked on the NOAA-9 automatic picture transmission (APT) and received a great image (Fig. 1) on the spacecraft's 47,100th orbit around the earth. At 14 orbits per day, this amounts to more than 3,300 days of operation—and the record continues to climb.

The United States launched the first meteorological satellite, TIROS I, on 1 April 1960. Since that time, many weather satellites have been launched by the U.S., Russia, Japan, Europe and China. The planned operational lifetime of polar-orbiting weather satellites is approximately two years.

The previous lifetime record for polar-orbiting weather satellites was U.S. NOAA 6. It was launched in 1979 and had an operational lifetime of 2,560 days. Second, and now third in the record book, is U.S. TIROS VII which operated for 1,809 days.

The author has been receiving and processing APT imagery on his home computer since the 1970s.

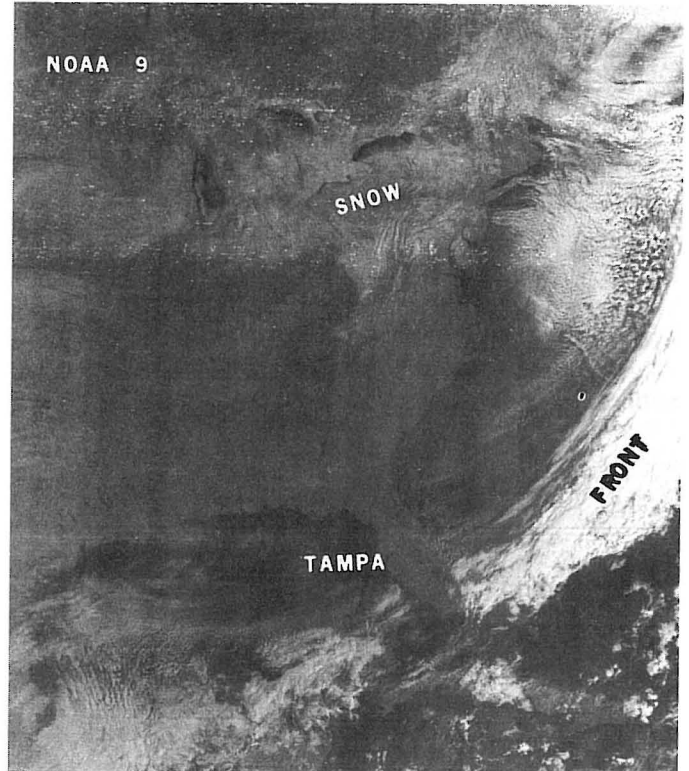


Fig. 1. NOAA-9 APT channel 2 visual near infrared (0.7–1.0 microns) image, 0900 EST 14 February 1994.